

# PTA's Understanding of the Interagency Coordinating Board - ICB

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Greetings to MCCPTA leadership.....I am pleased to have this opportunity to share information on the mission of the Interagency Coordinating Board (ICB) for Community Use of Public Facilities (CUPF) and the philosophy behind the guidelines that are in effect for the sharing of space. The concept of sharing space is a very complex one and does need to be explained.

The ICB is comprised of 12 members: the Chief Administrative Officer, Superintendent of Schools, President of the BOE, Staff Director of the County Council, President of Montgomery College, Commissioner from Park and Planning, 2 principal representatives, and four appointed citizen representatives. The Board is charged with making policy decisions related to the community's use of the public facilities and CUPF, established in 1978, is responsible for implementing the decisions. In addition to providing access to schools, CUPF leases space for use of libraries, closed schools, and other government buildings. It is important to note that CUPF operates as an Enterprise Fund and is supported totally by fees from community users. (No tax dollars are used to support the community use program).

Centralized Scheduling is implemented in all elementary, middle, and three pilot high schools (Kennedy, Richard Montgomery, Paint Branch). In these schools, all community use activities (including most PTA activities and the schools own programs that include additional staff costs) are scheduled by CUPF. Much of the impetus for Centralized Scheduling came from the need to coordinate all use in schools after hours and concerns that the rules for using county facilities did not seem to apply to everyone. There is a perception in the community that special arrangements are made if you "know the right people". That is a perception that must be corrected when schools are valuable resources paid for by all county residents through their taxes. These facilities belong to county residents and therefore must be accessible to them when not being used by schools for their instructional programs. While 75% of county residents do not have children in MCPS, their taxes are used to provide for building, operating, and maintaining these facilities. The benefits of Centralized Scheduling are already obvious in terms of conflict resolution and energy management. (we now have a picture of all activities taking place throughout the county and are able to work with schools to limit energy costs to only those areas of the facilities being used by the community).

The general rules for community use have been in place for more than two decades. What has changed over the years has been aspects of implementation. With the use of technology, efforts to streamline the process have improved accountability as well as addressed safety and security concerns. Guidelines are now being applied universally for all user groups.

We realize that PTAs are non-profit organizations, but perhaps what is not apparent is that 97% of our users are non-profits. Less than 3% are commercial users. As non-profits, they are all upset with costs but the Board is convinced that everyone must contribute to wear and tear. Fees had not been increased for 10 years. This past July, we were forced to increase the fees slightly to cover the increase in utility costs, supplies, wear and tear, and staff coverage to MCPS. Most recently, the Interagency Coordinating Board received a letter from the Board of Education, asking for additional increases in reimbursements to MCPS. As you can see, keeping facilities affordable and accessible is quite a challenge.

We certainly understand the closeness of the relationship between a PTA and the school, and the feeling of "partnership" this evokes. However, we also have a responsibility to ensure the rights of all county residents to use these facilities, knowing that these same PTA members are often members of other user groups as well.

There are certain PTA activities that are so closely related to the educational function of the K-12 academic program of the school that they are viewed as school functions. These activities are administratively booked by the school and held without cost to the PTA, e.g. monthly PTA meetings.

Other activities, however, are much more similar to community activities, such as PTA fairs, carnivals, and socials, and are expected to contribute to ICB's quarterly reimbursements to MCPS for staff coverage, supplies, utility costs, and wear and tear on schools. These activities are scheduled by CUPF.

PTA-sponsored activities are given priority consideration (and special facility rates) and are scheduled in advance of other public or non-profit functions. For example, if the PTA wanted to use multiple rooms in the school for a fundraiser on the weekend, they would only be charged for the cost of the worker's time, per hour and any additional clean-up time after the event. At the moment, it is \$25.50 per hour (based on union negotiations and may change from year to year). If extra workers are needed, they would be assessed at the same rate. If another user wanted to use multiple rooms, they would be charged for each room, each hour, in addition to clean-up. This is a significant difference. Everyone pays the start-up fee which is equal to 30 minutes of the workers time - 15 minutes to open before the group arrives, 15 minutes to close up after clean-up. The start-up fee is \$12.00 presently.

To take full advantage of this benefit, earlier planning is necessary. We understand that PTAs are volunteer organizations and it is sometimes difficult to coordinate the complex planning of some of these activities well in advance. However, many of the organizers of other activities that take place in our facilities face similar obstacles. We need to give them as much planning time and notice as possible so that their events can also be successful. This is why we have the "special PTA priority window".

The major window for users to submit their requests is from July 15 - August 1. During that time, about 4500 indoor use forms (does not include the numerous requests for outdoor use) are submitted to this office for consideration of programs that begin September 1 through March 31. **PTAs have until August 15 to submit their requests.** Whatever they need, they would get. The PTA programs are entered into the computer and no users are scheduled for those days. Please keep in mind that users are contacting us regularly asking for the status of their permits. We wait until after the **August 15<sup>th</sup>** deadline before issuing permits to community groups. Outdoor users are cancelled accordingly when PTAs inform us by August 15th.

Booking the PTA functions in advance allows us to give these other groups an accurate and timely picture of facility availability so that they can begin to develop their programs. Of course we will still serve PTAs that do not submit within this special window, but we cannot move or cancel other users that followed proper procedures to secure facility space and have already planned for their events. These events also serve county residents and, in fact, many serve Montgomery County children that may attend the school itself or live in the neighborhood of the school.

Because any change in procedure is difficult and can be confusing, especially for PTAs who may be accustomed to special arrangements in the past, we have tried to be sensitive to these concerns in our phasing in of Centralized Scheduling over the past few years. Community activities were cancelled to accommodate last minute PTA requests when possible. A transition period was built in to help ease PTA representatives into the routine of submitting requests to CUPF within specific timeframes. We are now three years into Centralized Scheduling and are pleased to report that many PTAs have adjusted well to the new system and are submitting timely requests.

In the past, this office, unaware of an agreement between the school and the PTA, would have issued a permit to a user only to find out days before the event (or even **the day** before the event) that the PTA was expecting to use the facility. No forms were ever submitted to this office, just a verbal agreement between school and PTA. Everyone is negatively impacted by such last minute information.

We are confident that centralized scheduling will ultimately provide a win-win solution for all parties involved. We hope all PTA representatives will focus on scheduling their events early, eliminating last minute conflicts. An open invitation is extended to incoming PTA presidents to attend one of our weekly Wednesday morning training sessions held in the CUPF office to better understand the process. Call 240-777-2706 to register.

With better planning on everyone's part, we hope that all users of public facilities will experience success with their worthwhile endeavors to serve county residents. My staff and I are always willing to work with the PTA to discuss ways to improve the process.

Regards, Ginny